

Report

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

■ 1.0 Site Description

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (Monument) was established in 1937 to preserve approximately 326,852 acres of Sonoran Desert for the public interest. The Monument exhibits an extraordinary collection of Sonoran Desert plants, including the organ pipe cactus, a large cactus rarely found in the United States (see Figure 1). The Monument is located in southern Arizona along the international border with Mexico between Yuma and Nogales, Arizona, approximately 22 miles south of Why, Arizona. State Route 85 (AZ 85) runs north-south through the middle of the Monument (see Figure 2). This route provides the primary access from the United States to the Mexican tourist area of Rocky Point, approximately 60 miles south of the Monument.

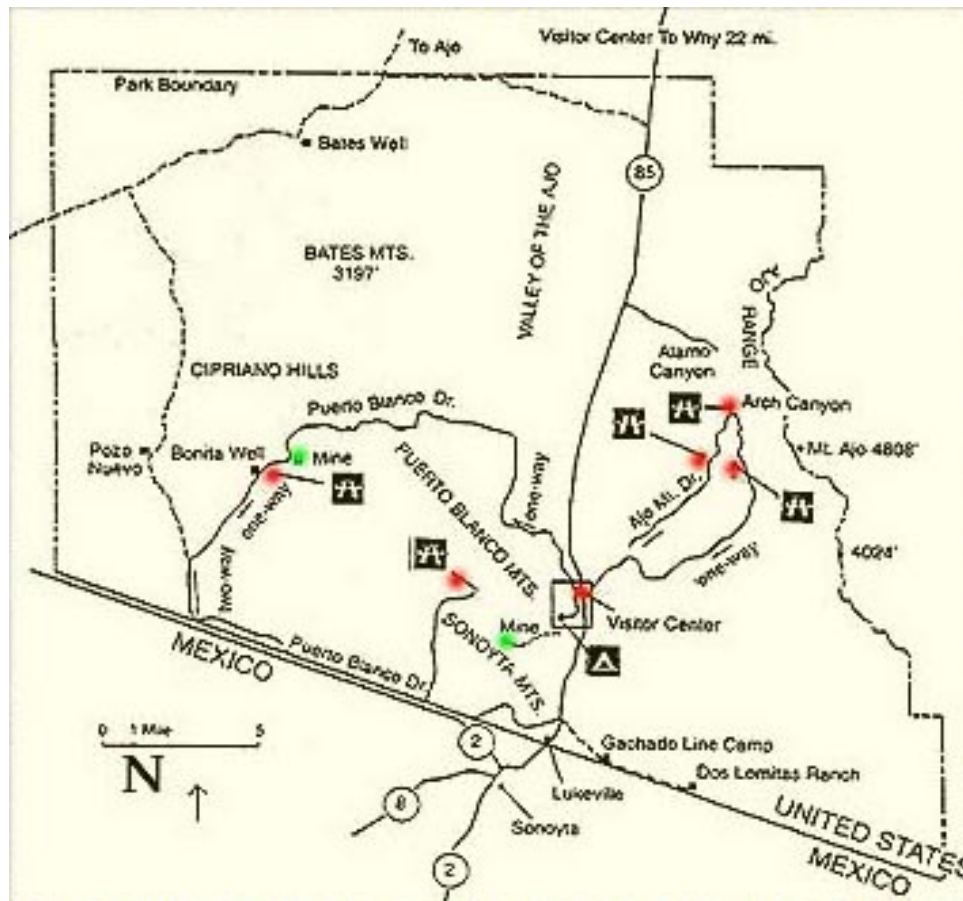
Figure 1. Typical Scenery at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument



The Lukeville Port of Entry is located along the southern edge of the Monument. The Tohono O’odham Indian Nation borders the Monument on the east. Federal lands managed by the BLM are located adjacent to the northern boundary of the Monument. The Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located adjacent to the Monument on the west and north sides with access provided via Bates Well Road running through the northern portion of the Monument from AZ 85 to the NWR.

The Monument consists of approximately 330,687 acres, 95 percent of which has been designated wilderness, or authorized as potential wilderness, under the Wilderness Act. Primary components of the Monument include:

Figure 2. Site Map



- **Visitor Center** – Located in the southern portion of the Monument, the Visitor Center is accessible from AZ 85 and includes parking for 34 cars and four recreational vehicles (RVs).
- **Scenic Drives** – The Monument contains two scenic drives: the 21-mile Ajo Mountain Drive, a one-way loop that takes approximately two hours to drive, and the 53-mile Puerto Blanco Drive that takes approximately five hours to complete. These roads are primarily unpaved and devoid of base materials. Turnouts and two picnic areas are located along each drive.
- **Camping** – There are two camping areas on the Monument. Twin Peaks consists of 208 campsites and five group sites. Alamo Canyon Wash is a primitive campground.
- **Trails** – There are over 15 miles of trails on the Monument.
- **Points of Interest** – There are several sites of interest for the visitor disbursed throughout the Monument. These include the Bates Well Ranch, Gachado Line Camp, Dos Lomitas Ranch, and the Quitobaquito Oasis. Each site has a parking area with less than 10 spaces.

The Monument is open 24 hours per day year round. The Visitor Center is open daily from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. except Christmas Day. January through mid April is the peak visitation period. Generally the number of visitors is consistent seven days per week. The entrance fee for the Monument is \$4.00 per vehicle. Over the last several years the number of annual visitors ranged between 200,000 to 400,000, depending on the extent of wild-flowers that bloom in the spring. Based on projections of the Monument Manager, visitation levels are expected to increase by 10 percent over the next five years.

The majority of the visitors are retirees that are either staying in campsites on the Monument or in area campsites outside the Monument. Typical characteristic visits are identified below:

- Visitor Center and scenic drive visitors that stay between two to three hours. During peak periods, Visitor Center counts reach 2,000 daily.
- Hikers generally spend a full day on the Monument. Counts were not available on the average number of daily hikers.
- Campers generally stay seven to 14 days on the Monument. During peak periods, an estimated 400 to 500 persons stay in the campgrounds on a daily basis.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

The Monument currently provides van trips around the scenic drives. The system operates Wednesday through Sundays during the peak season using a 15-passenger van (the van is limited to 12 persons and the driver to ensure passenger comfort), which picks up passengers at the Visitor Center and campgrounds. From Thursday through Sunday the van makes two trips per day around Ajo Mountain Drive. On Wednesday one trip is made around the Puerto Blanco loop. There is no fee to ride the van shuttle, but donations are requested. Donations collected generally match the \$3,000 annual cost to run the system.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

Additional identified Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) needs include the expansion of the current system, through increasing the vehicle carrying capacity and/or the number of days per week the system operates. Due to the popularity of the system, reservations are taken and they generally fill up one to two weeks in advance. Providing visitor information and related services on the Monument Web site could enhance visitor management. This could include providing information on the shuttle schedule and availability. Based on current ridership demand, the current ATS could be expanded to seven days per week during the peak visitation season. In addition, the size of the vehicle and/or the number of daily trips could also be increased.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Needs

The expanded van service is viewed as a necessity to meet visitor needs, provide a pleasant visitor experience, and preserve the natural setting. Monument roads are unpaved to reflect its primitive character. The majority of the roads are in poor condition and not suitable for RVs and most non-four-wheel drive vehicles. In addition, many visitors arriving in RVs do not bring alternate vehicles. Currently, the van shuttle system is booked weeks in advance and many visitors do not have the opportunity to use the system.

An expanded van service, along with publication of the service on the Organ Pipe Cactus Web site, would better meet visitor needs. Expansion of the current ATS service would enable additional visitors without a means of personal transportation suitable to drive on Monument roads to view the spectacular scenery of the Monument. The van shuttle system offers these visitors an opportunity to view areas of the Monument they would not otherwise have the opportunity to see. An expanded system could also provide additional interpretive opportunities. Expansion of the van tours would enable more visitors to be served, enable the routes to be expanded, and provide the opportunity for visitors to use the system without the need to make advance reservations.

In addition to enhancing the visitor experience, expanding the van tours would reduce the Monument's vehicular traffic, thus help to preserve and protect the natural environment. A reduction in vehicles driving the Monument grounds would reduce noise levels and air quality.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

National Park Service. *Final General Management Plan, Development Concept Plans, Environment Impact Statement, Organ Cactus National Monument*, July 1997.

<http://www.nps.gov/orpi/> (visited November 1, 1999).

http://www.desertusa.com/organ/du_orgmap.html (visited November 1, 1999).

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

William Wellman, Monument Manager, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument